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IN MEMORIAM
THOMAS BONNAR



Aug 2nd /77.

James Cowan Esq M.P.

with kind regards
from the Browns

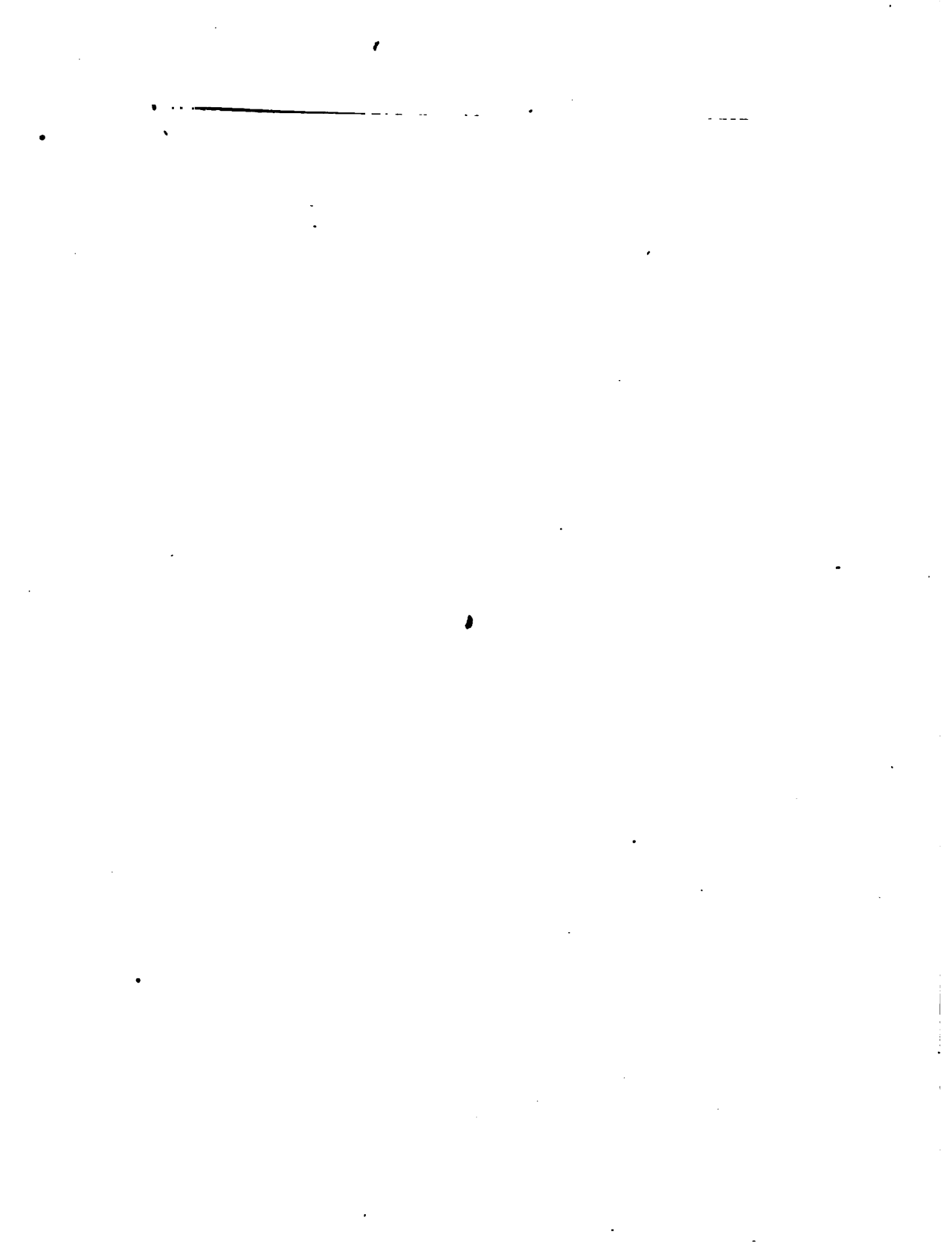
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In Memoriam.

THOMAS BONNAR.



Yours truly
Thomas Sumner



In Memoriam

THOMAS BONNAR.

BY

A. L. SIMPSON, D.D.,

F. S. A., Scot.

EDINBURGH.

1876.



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THOMAS BONNAR.



HAT the relatives and more immediate friends of the late Thomas Bonnar, of the Firm "Bonnar and Carfrae," Edinburgh—so long and honourably connected with the art of Interior-Decoration—should wish to have some permanent memorial of him, however brief, is by no means surprising. It is the natural consequence of the many amiable qualities which he possessed,—qualities which were such as to endear him most to those who knew him best. As a husband and father, he was distinguished by such a tenderness of affection as easily won for him the love and esteem of every member of his household; and to them he has left a memory fragrant with whatever is most dear to the human heart. Those, on the other hand, who, outside the family-circle, were privileged with his acquaintance and confidence, found him a sincere and steadfast friend; while in all his business relations he was singularly straightforward and honourable. These are claims to recollection which are not easily overlooked.

Apart, however, from what he was in his more private relations, there is more than sufficient reason why he should not be allowed to pass away without some commemorative words. In his professional capacity he was long conspicuous and eminent; and the references to some of his principal achievements in the way of interior-decoration, embodied in this memoir, or appended to it, will indicate the important service which he rendered to Decorative Art. An artist by nature, in so far as feeling and proclivity were concerned,—and from his earliest years surrounded by influences tending to strengthen and develop the feeling, yet, through a combination of circumstances, kept back from the pursuit of Art, strictly so-called,—he carried to the execution of his work as a house-decorator, both a higher idea of what that work should be, and a much greater amount of artistic knowledge and skill than had been even thought of before as either necessary or appropriate in that sphere of endeavour. And the consequence of this was, the inauguration of a class and style of work much more intellectual and truly artistic than had been previously exemplified in this country.

In addition to an exquisite feeling for colour in its most delicate gradations, and in those subtle combinations from which come richness of tone and quiet harmony of effect, Mr. Bonnar was gifted with inventive power in no inconsiderable degree; to which he added the attainment of thoroughly matured executive skill. He was conscientiously painstaking



L'Amour peché



in all his work ; and, as might have been expected, gave the highest satisfaction to those who entrusted him with commissions.

His knowledge of Art proper might be said to be that of an experienced professional artist ; and his judgment of individual pictures was highly discriminating and intelligent. With this the present writer was much impressed, by accidentally meeting him on one occasion at Burlington House during the Exhibition of the Royal Academy. His passing criticisms on the various works were characterized by both subtlety and originality, while they indicated a higher sense of the importance and mental reference of Art than is usually met with. In this connection it is much to be regretted that letters which, while visiting some of the Continental galleries, he addressed to a relative, and in which he recorded his opinion of numerous works which came under his eye, have not been preserved. Looking back on Mr. Bonnar's career, we cannot but feel that the devoting of himself to Decorative Art as the business of his life must have been attended with not a little self-denial, considering his liking and fitness for the higher art ; a feeling, however, which is greatly modified by the gain which thus accrued to the art of Decoration, from the superior knowledge and abilities which he brought to bear upon it, and the elevation which it received at his hand.

THOMAS BONNAR was born in "Bonnar's Land," West Port, Edinburgh, on the 13th of March 1810. This "land," or tenement, having many generations previously been erected by a member of the family, received according to the custom of the time the family name. About twenty years ago it was pulled down, and a modern edifice erected on its site; which still, however, retains the old name, and owns, to some extent at least, the old proprietorship. Adjoining it, it may be mentioned, stands a handsome building, containing a spacious hall, which was presented in the latter part of the last century, by Mr. Bonnar's grandfather, to the Bailie of the Port, and in which were held the business and social meetings of its various Crafts.

Belonging on the father's side to an old Edinburgh family, Mr. Bonnar was also by his mother connected with the "ancient town." She was the daughter of a Mr. William Shankie, an East India merchant, who had married a Miss Wilson, daughter of one of the partners of a well-known firm of solicitors, also in Edinburgh. Soon after his marriage, Mr. Shankie became warmly interested in the political agitation which about that time—1793—overran the country. Identifying himself with the Edinburgh section of the reforming party, he quickly found, in common with his associates, that he was looked on as an enemy to the British crown and constitution; but of which, events were yet destined to prove that the moderate changes he advocated were to be the most

powerful bulwark. Such, however, was not the temper of the time; and he found it necessary, to escape not only suspicion, but danger, to abandon home and business, and to begin life afresh in London. Here, after a hard struggle, he was eventually successful; and here, after a residence of many years, he died. His wife's death, soon after, left their two children orphans; one of whom, a boy, succeeded to his father's business; the other, much younger, a little girl, was confided to the care of an aunt. The child, who ran much risk of being spoilt, was saved from this by her many native good qualities. She grew up, and subsequently became the wife of the elder Mr. Bonnar, and the mother of the subject of our sketch. The elder Mr. Bonnar carried on successfully the business of a house-decorator, in which he was well-known as a proficient. He died while yet in his prime, leaving his widow and a family of three sons and one daughter to mourn his loss. Thomas Bonnar was the second of these sons. And before proceeding to narrate in further detail the events of his career, it may be interesting, in a few words, to refer to the histories of his brothers and sister.

The eldest son, William, after following for a short time his father's occupation, ultimately abandoned it for a higher sphere of art. In the latter he was, it is scarcely necessary to say, eminently successful,—his special domain being Historical Painting. He was elected a Royal Scottish Academician. Of his more important works we need only mention

here,—“Knox Dispensing the Sacrament before the Lords of the Congregation at St. Andrews;” “The Benefactress;” and “Bruce and the Spider.” These and others are well-known, not only from the originals, but from the engravings of them which have been published. Dundas, the youngest son, was also endowed with a large share of artistic ability. He ultimately settled in Greenock, also as a house-decorator; but devoting himself almost exclusively to the more prosaic branches of his business, he ended by letting slip its higher attainments, for which at one time he had shown so great an aptitude. The only daughter became the wife of the celebrated George Kemp, the architect of the Edinburgh Scott Monument.

And now we return to Thomas Bonnar.

Early trained to his father's business, it may easily be imagined that the boy's strong natural bent towards Art was greatly strengthened by his surroundings. His brother William, ten years his senior, was, while Thomas was yet a child, rapidly acquiring reputation as an artist; and no doubt it is to this early stage of his career that we must refer the beginning of that passionate love of Art, which grew with his growth, and never ceased to be his guiding-star through life. In every possible way did the boy's inclination show itself. Drawing was his delight, and was pursued at all hazards and under all circumstances. The nice white soles of the up-turned shoes, awaiting sale on the stall of a West Port shoe-

maker of the time, offered an irresistible temptation to the youthful artist; and it was only when their indignant possessor and his customers showed a decided want of appreciation of his efforts in that line, that he was induced to give them up. At the age of seven he even painted two small pictures,—one of them representing a Highlander in full costume, in his native glen, vainly endeavouring during a high wind to regale himself with a pinch of snuff; an idea borrowed doubtless from some one of the numerous sign-boards, which were at the time the chief, if not the only, means of conveying artistic culture to the public mind. Great was his grief when, during an unlucky absence from home, he found that some friends from the country had called, and had too much admired his treasures, for they had won from his mother a permission which would never have been obtained from him, to carry them off for ever to their rural abode.

But we are approaching an incident which might have changed the whole after-current of his life. When Thomas was about twelve years of age, his brother William was engaged, in conjunction with Stansfield and Roberts, in the painting-room of the Theatre-Royal. Thomas, to his great delight, was very often permitted to accompany his brother there as humble assistant; and in that capacity he displayed so much sharpness and ability as to attract Roberts' attention very strongly towards him; so that when that afterwards celebrated artist

resolved to settle in London, he asked that young Bonnar might be allowed to go with him thither. This proposal was, however, refused by his elder brother, who considered the boy too young to go so far from home, and who also feared for their mother the pain of separation from a child to whom she was very fondly attached. Thomas Bonnar often referred to this circumstance, in after-years, with a half-pride and a half-melancholy in his speculation of what, under such auspices, and in such a field, he might have been enabled to achieve. May we be permitted here and now to echo that half-sad remark; and while acknowledging with admiration—and, indeed, because acknowledging with admiration—the rare excellence of what, in a kindred sphere, Mr. Bonnar actually accomplished, may we insinuate a doubt as to the entire wisdom of his brother's course in this matter, actuated though it evidently was by the best of motives? Under such a master, with such a decided native talent, what indeed might he not ultimately have done? And this we cannot help regretting so much the more, when we see all through his after-life the painful and fruitless hankering after leisure, after opportunity,—the vain looking forward to a time which was never to arrive, in which, yet for a little, he might devote himself to what was ever his brightest dream—the pursuit of High Art. And this, though he knew it not, was inevitable. For, soon after the rejection of the London proposal, he was regularly apprenticed to the business his father had followed;

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and from that moment the die was cast. For High Art is an exacting mistress ; she must be served with all the strength, or none. As has been well remarked by one of the ablest of modern Art-critics, Mr. Hamerton: "Painting, unfortunately, *veut son homme tout entier*—will have its man altogether,—all the main current of his thoughts and his ambition, all the best hours of his life. Any sacrifice less than this, the Muse of Painting does not accept."

As regards his apprenticeship, an outburst of boyish impatience seems to have precipitated this event. Perhaps fearing further opposition on the part of his relatives, or chafing under his recent disappointment, he set off alone, on foot, to Glasgow, and presented himself, in a very forlorn condition, at the house of some friends there, with the simple remark that he had "come to seek work as a painter." Of course, after kindly entertaining him for a day or two, they sent the boy home again ; and were, doubtless, not a little amused by this display of youthful ardour. Mr. Somerville, house painter, to whom he was immediately afterwards apprenticed, was a man of much ability, and well versed in the principles as well as in the details of his art. Under him young Bonnar made most rapid progress—progress which will be best illustrated by the next step in his career. At the expiration of his apprenticeship, and when he was only sixteen years old, he and his youngest brother, Dundas, actuated by various reasons, resolved to leave Edinburgh and settle somewhere else.

They arranged to proceed, in the first instance, to Glasgow; and accordingly set out, after many affectionate leave-takings, by the canal-boat. But a severe gale coming on, the boat was not only disabled, but the lives of those on board were placed in considerable danger, and it was with some difficulty that Thomas and his brother found their way back after midnight to the home they had so hopefully quitted in the morning. Not discouraged by this misadventure, they soon afterwards accomplished the journey in safety. And though, as we have already stated, Thomas Bonnar was at this time only sixteen, he was, immediately on his arrival in Glasgow, at once offered the position of first decorator in the establishment of Mr. Wardlaw. This he accepted; and very shortly afterwards his duties comprised the superintendence of the whole decorative work in course of execution.

His marriage to Miss Mary Thom, is the next event we have to chronicle. This lady, who belonged to Edinburgh, was a niece of Thom the Scottish artist, painter of the picture "The Young Recruit." This work was engraved by Duncan of London, and is a very spirited, early specimen of a school which was to reach a glorious culmination under Sir David Wilkie.

Mr. Bonnar may now be regarded as very fortunately launched in life. In the prime of early manhood, devotedly attached to his wife, with a happy home and an opening sphere, there was scarcely a cloud to mar the brightness of his

prospects. After a time a cloud did indeed appear; but that, though never entirely dissipated, lost for a long period its most threatening aspect. After the birth of their eldest son, the delicate state of Mrs. Bonnar's health occasioned her husband great anxiety, and continued to do so more or less for many years. The kindness and consideration of his employer, Mr. Wardlaw, seems, in these circumstances, to have been very remarkable, and no doubt contributed much to Mrs. Bonnar's happiness and comfort. For example: Mr. Bonnar's business often took him to the country, and detained him there for lengthened periods; and in such cases Mr. Wardlaw always made a point of securing suitable accommodation for Mrs. Bonnar, that so she might be able to accompany her husband.

About this time Glasgow was becoming celebrated for the magnificent steamships which were being built on the banks of the Clyde. These "floating palaces"—as a certain class of them has been well designated—afforded, in the embellishment of their gorgeous cabins and saloons, full scope to the powers of the decorative artist. Horatio M'Culloch found here an outlet for the first efforts of his genius; and many of their most beautiful figure-pieces and landscapes were at this time executed by Mr. Bonnar. Busy as at this period Mr. Bonnar's daily life was, he yet found time to produce a large number of drawings and sketches, forming altogether a valuable collection of artistic memoranda; nor would any one

suppose, from the care and finish with which these are executed, that the whole time of the artist had not been devoted to them. And, in addition, he occasionally exhibited, in the local galleries, works of which the subjects were chiefly allegorical, and that were characterized by a high degree of classic taste and sentiment. This, it may be remarked here, he had, on leaving Glasgow, to give up, as on his subsequent return to Edinburgh, finding it necessary to make an exclusive choice of one or other branch of Art, he reluctantly resolved, for the time at least, to adhere to his original sphere of Interior-decoration.

But his wife's health, always delicate, was now becoming alarmingly so; and after every resource which affection or medical skill could supply had been appealed to, but in vain, it was resolved that a return to her native air should be tried. Mr. Wardlaw attempted in vain to combat this resolution: he was naturally most unwilling to lose one so valuable to him in a business capacity, and for whom, besides, he entertained such a sincere sentiment of regard and esteem. A partnership on most favourable terms was offered, but nothing availed to shake Mr. Bonnar's decision; once convinced that his wife's health demanded the change, the only question with him, henceforth, was how to make it. And, strangely enough, just at this juncture an opening occurred in the establishment of the well-known Mr. D. R. Hay of Edinburgh, recognized as the leader of Decorative Art in Scotland.



And whenever Mr. Hay heard that Mr. Bonnar was disengaged, he at once offered him the vacant post—that of head of his decorative staff. It is needless to say how much gratified Mr. Bonnar was by this tribute to his professional ability, coming as it did from such a quarter, or how readily he accepted an offer so consonant with his wishes and so encouraging to his aspirations. Thus, after an absence of thirteen years, he finally returned to his native city; and though at first there was some grumbling and even jealousy among his new associates,—many of whom, his seniors in point of age, objected to so young a man being brought in over their heads,—no long time elapsed before his thorough mastery of his work, and his modest, gentle, and straightforward disposition silenced his enemies, converted opponents into friends, and justified in the sight of all the appointment which had been made.

Soon after his entering upon this engagement with Mr. Hay, Her present Majesty's accession to the throne was the occasion of a heavy call being made on Mr. Bonnar's artistic resources. As is their wont at such times, the citizens of Edinburgh were extremely lavish in their demonstrations of loyalty, and amongst other celebrations of the event they entrusted Mr. Hay with a commission for three large pictorial designs, intended to be exhibited by day and illuminated by night. The largest of these was to be displayed in front of the Royal Bank, in St. Andrew's Square. The execution of

this order was handed over entirely to Mr. Bonnar, and in the task he was eminently successful. The principal picture was allegorical; representing the introduction of the Queen to her subjects by Britannia, while denizens of the remoter parts of the British Empire are shown in the act of doing homage to their Sovereign, and laying at her feet offerings suggestive of the native products of their various countries. Surmounting the whole are lustrous clouds, where are to be seen innumerable Cupids, some flying, some resting, and some hovering over the central figure, as if significant of future blessings invoked on the head of the youthful monarch. All the figures were of colossal proportions, as may be inferred from the size of the picture, which was about thirty feet square; and the task of combining boldness of execution with delicacy of feeling and expression was no easy one. This was the first work of the kind Mr. Bonnar had ever been called on to perform, and much anxiety and labour it cost him. He used often to refer to the keen pleasure its unqualified success conferred upon him,—a pleasure commensurate with the difficulties in its treatment he had so completely overcome. The other two designs produced by him on this occasion received also a large share of public admiration.

But the success of these individual efforts, pleasing as it was to Mr. Bonnar, was still more valuable to him as indicating a desire in the public mind for a higher style of Decorative Art than had yet been called for in this country. To

foster this desire, to raise the standard of the profession, and to prove by actual fact that in this department native artists could easily rival the best productions of their Continental compeers, was the aim which Mr. Bonnar ever placed before him. And now that he has left us, we are able to see how complete was the success which crowned his efforts. To him belongs the honour of first bringing into notice a system of decoration hitherto unknown in this country; and also the double honour of having, by his own masterpieces, placed it upon a secure because an artistic basis.

That, once presented to public view, this beautiful style of decoration met ready encouragement, we have many proofs. In the mansions which bestud the country are to be found many noble examples of it. Let us mention, for instance, Falkland House, where, many years ago, Mr. Bonnar decorated a boudoir in the Italian style for Mrs. Tyndal Bruce—a work so highly appreciated by that lady, that, to mark her admiration of it, as well as her high esteem for the artist, she designated it “Bonnar’s Room;” and when herself precluded by age from using it, she had it carefully locked—no one, without special permission, being allowed to enter it.

The late Colonel Mure of Caldwell, in Renfrewshire, on his return from a lengthened tour on the Continent, in the course of which he had visited the classic remains of Italy and Greece, resolved to have the hall in Caldwell House decorated in the Pompeiian style. This was carried out most

successfully by Mr. Bonnar, acting under Colonel Mure's immediate supervision and direction. Colonel Mure was entirely satisfied with the work ; which had been, indeed, a source of no small pleasure to the Decorator. It is believed to have been the first of the kind executed in Scotland.

Soon after this, Mr. Hay having obtained several original panel-paintings by Watteau, brought them under the notice of Mr. Bonnar, who was at once struck by their various merits, and by their adaptability to decorative purposes. A system, indeed, which permits the endless introduction of beautiful and sprightly forms in landscape, figure, or scroll, and which offers such a tempting field to the genuine artist, was not likely to lack appreciation from Mr. Bonnar. His genius, which neither required nor could brook slavish adherence to rule, whether in subject or treatment, found itself peculiarly at home here, and he was at once filled with the desire of revivifying this form of Decorative Art, and of making it popular in this country. In this it may be briefly stated that he was thoroughly successful, although he had many difficulties to overcome,—particularly those occasioned by our severe and variable climate. The beauty and capacity of the method are demonstrated by—amongst many others—the Interiors of the mansion-houses of Glenlyon and Morton Hall in this country, and Ballyshannon Castle in Ireland. A description of one of these is sufficient to give an idea of all ; and Morton Hall, from its nearness to Edinburgh, seems

a suitable example to select. And in this instance we have a striking proof of how artistic skill can produce a powerful effect with comparatively scanty materials. The drawing-room, in which is the work we are describing, has a panelled ceiling, finished in light tints, with gilding, the cornice being done in a similar manner, while the walls are painted an imitation damask diaper design. The doors and shutters are finished a light ivory tone, and the special features are contained within the panels of these. They consist of oval figure-subjects, representing the Seasons, and of landscapes illustrative of the divisions of the day. These ovals are enclosed within a plain band of gold, broken at regular intervals, and the whole panel is surrounded by two simple bands of gilding. The drawing and colouring of these pictures, full as they are of power and originality, furnish indubitable proof—if proof were needed—of Mr. Bonnar's high possession of the pure art faculty. They are, too, in admirable keeping with the whole room, imparting to it an air of liveliness and character, and checking the tendency to heaviness which the treatment of some of the other parts is calculated to produce. Altogether, a masterpiece this, of Decorative Art; a judicious blending of higher with lower, a harmonious whole, which not only delights the eye, but stimulates the mind.

For the late Bishop Gillies, both now and at a subsequent period, Mr. Bonnar executed some very fine works; notably two life-size figures of Apostles, and also a picture of our Lord,

who is represented in a recumbent attitude. For accurate knowledge of the proportions of the human frame, for delicacy of manipulation, and for loftiness of sentiment, these productions, and especially the last, are peculiarly distinguished.

We next find him employed on a large Allegorical Painting, intended for the City Hall of Glasgow. Here the Genius of Commerce is represented as seated in the midst of appropriate surroundings, while some of the beautiful local scenery is skilfully introduced as a background. This picture, although removed from its original position, still remains an admirable example of the inventive powers and able execution of the artist.

The Directors of George Watson's Hospital being desirous of testifying their respect for the memory of the founder of their Institution, resolved on having executed for it a view of Peterhead, his birthplace. This task was confided to Mr. Bonnar; and he performed it in such a manner as to receive the cordial approbation of the Directors, and to enhance his own well-earned reputation. These, and similar productions—for only the more important are referred to here—serve sufficiently to show his ever-growing mastery of his art, as well as the wonderful versatility of his pencil.

Mr. Bonnar had now been about six years in the employment of Mr. Hay, and at this time he seems to have cast various longing glances towards London as a field in which his peculiar gifts would be likely to find a recompense, both as

regards reputation and substantial reward, which it was vain to look for in the comparatively circumscribed sphere of his native city. Mr. Hay, in the first instance, induced him to refrain from making any change; and he seems ultimately to have given up the London idea, for shortly afterwards we find him proposing to Mr. Robert Carfrae that they two should enter into partnership for the purpose of beginning business for themselves in Edinburgh. Mr. Carfrae had served his apprenticeship with Mr. Hay, and both then and afterwards had been brought into close and constant contact with Mr. Bonnar. The result was that a warm friendship sprang up between them,—a friendship, it may be remarked here, which remained unbroken until it was severed by the cold hand of death. Mr. Hay did everything in his power to induce Mr. Bonnar to remain with him, and to relinquish the contemplated plan. He offered him a partnership at once, with the prospect of his own retirement from the conduct of the business in a few years. But nothing could shake Mr. Bonnar's resolution. He remained firm, bound not only by his promise to Mr. Carfrae, but by a feeling that the time had come when entire freedom in the practice of his art was imperative,—a freedom which he knew it was impossible he could enjoy while acting under the authority of another. And so it was that, after the requisite preparations, the firm of "Bonnar and Carfrae" began business in very convenient and suitable premises in Castle Street. This was in or about

the year 1846. And, as illustrative of the character of the man,—indeed of both men,—it may be mentioned that the simple verbal arrangement, sealed by a shake of the hand, which had first been entered into, was the only deed of co-partnery that was ever found necessary. Their unswerving reliance on each other's honour and integrity, their sincere and ever-increasing friendship, not only made possible, but by its results justified, a mode of proceeding which, alas, in ordinary cases would have been injudicious, and most likely disastrous.

The new firm was eminently successful even from the first, their most sanguine aspirations in this respect being surpassed. Mr. Bonnar's capabilities had by this time become so well known that this is not wonderful, and many of those for whom he had executed work while with Mr. Hay became supporters of the new establishment.

A few years after this an incident occurred which is strikingly illustrative of Mr. Bonnar's love of Art in its highest phase, as well as of his generous and sympathetic disposition. He had long been an admirer of one of Scotland's greatest, and certainly one of her most original artists, David Scott. And that at a time when he found few admirers—none among the multitude. Scott's works on the walls of the Academy, often in proximity as they were to the feeble prettinesses which are so apt to abound in such places, were deprived of much of their weird power and high intel-

lectual character. It occurred to Mr. Bonnar, shortly after the artist's death, that if they could be exhibited together in a separate place, the chance of public recognition would be greatly increased. He accordingly, with the concurrence of his partner, offered for this purpose the use of their great saloon in Castle Street. The offer was accepted ; and, in the words of Scott's brother and biographer, "these works, thus collected together, made an impression on the Edinburgh public not easily forgotten, and the intention of the promoters in this respect was fully successful, as well as in the disposal of many of the smaller pictures."* And no doubt this exhibition largely helped to pave the way to the high place in the national estimation now so long held by that great and original genius. This was among the earliest instances in which the productions of an artist were gathered together for separate exhibition. Mr. Bonnar showed the works of his brother, William Bonnar, R.S.A., in the same manner after his death.

And before leaving the subject of David Scott: Mr. Bonnar used often to refer to the feelings of grief and deep annoyance called forth in him by an accidental visit paid about this time to what had once been the abode of that distinguished artist. He found pick and crowbar everywhere at work ; what had been erewhile the home of high thoughts and brilliant imaginings, was being rapidly levelled with the

* "Memoir of David Scott, R.S.A.," p. 349.

ground. Even the inner shrine—the Studio—was being ruthlessly pulled to pieces, adorned though it was by a series of wonderful Frescoes, done on the plaster in the artist's best manner. A portion of these Mr. Bonnar was fortunately able to rescue, and they were preserved by him with the greatest care.

The great Exhibition of 1851 was the occasion of one of Mr. Bonnar's happiest efforts. This was a large frieze in the Italian style; the subject, "Pursuit of a Stag by Cupids," armed with bows and accompanied by dogs. The chase is going on in the midst of a mass of beautifully-drawn and powerfully-coloured scroll foliage, from which the figures stand out, full of grace and animation. This production excited much admiration, both at the time and afterwards, and many expressed surprise at its being the work of an artist who had never quitted the shores of Great Britain. He also contributed to this Exhibition two Pompeian panels, which, while retaining all the feeling of the original, were intended to show how this style of decoration might be adapted to modern requirements.

And now Mr. Bonnar may be regarded as in the full rush and press of his business career. His time entirely occupied, flinging himself into his work with that earnestness of purpose and attention to detail which ever mark the genuine artist, earning the respect and confidence of every one with whom he came in contact, Mr. Bonnar was justified in assum-

ing that a few more years of toil and prosperity would place him in such a position as would enable him to realize the dream of his youth,—leisure for High Art studies. But this thought, which had doubtless been his comfort alike in the everyday worries incident to the conduct of a large and increasing business, and in the long and wearisome journeys he was often obliged to make for the supervision of undertakings sometimes at a great distance from Edinburgh, was destined never to be realized. For just when the long looked for time seemed to be approaching, an event took place which more deeply than ever enveloped him in business cares. This was the amalgamation of his Firm with that of Lithgow and Purdie, which took place in 1860. The increased labour and anxiety, and multiplied engagements, which were a natural consequence of this step, had one good effect,—they contributed to divert his mind from too much brooding over a great grief which had befallen him a year or two previous. His eldest son, William,—a young man who seems to have inherited no small share of his father's artistic talents,—was taken from him. He felt this deeply, as might have been expected from his warm and affectionate disposition, but it was only preparatory for a yet heavier blow. Mrs. Bonnar, always delicate, never recovered from the shock of her fondly-loved son's death. Very quickly she followed him to the grave, leaving her husband and youthful family keenly to mourn their irreparable loss.

One of the first works executed after the amalgamation of the two firms, was the decoration of the staircase of Cantray House, Inverness-shire. The dome was elaborately painted in the Italian style, the groundwork being a beautiful deep blue, with groups of Cupids and wreaths of flowers dispersed over it. In the lunettes were placed representations of the classic divinities, finished with much care and taste. The walls were of a neutral tint, which greatly enhanced the effect of the decoration overhead. For the International Exhibition of 1862, Mr. Bonnar prepared a large and handsome specimen of Decorative Art, representing the entire side of a drawing-room, twenty-five feet in length and seventeen feet high. It was divided into three compartments of equal size, with circular tops. The centre compartment consisted of a mirror resting on a sur-base of carved and gilded scroll-work, and rising to within a few inches of the enriched frieze. The side compartments were slightly recessed, and contained the doors supposed to lead into the room. These were painted in white enamel, with enriched mouldings, and had beautifully carved and gilded capes placed over them, which again were surmounted by semicircular panels, in which were placed designs emblematical of the Arts and Sciences. The capitals of the pilasters between the centre and the side compartments were filled in with fancy heads; while in the centre were circular panels, with cameo heads, white on a purple ground, representing Spring and Autumn. The groundwork of the whole



was formed of shades of mauve and Sienna marbles. Altogether, the work produced an effect both grand and pleasing, and held its own even when placed in competition with the best specimens of English and Continental Decorative Art.

The design contributed to the Dublin Exhibition of 1865 was of a totally different character. Not quite so long, but rather higher, it represented a section, or rather the end, of a dining-room wall. The main feature of the work was a large and grandly-painted frieze illustrative of the classical story of the Triumph of Galatea. The Sea-Nymph is seated in a triumphal barge, drawn by swans and guided by Cupids, preceded and followed by their respective attendants. Two small panels at either side contain a continuation of the subject. Under the frieze, the wall is divided into three panels, separated by boldly-executed mouldings and trusses, carved and gilt, the centres of the panels and styles being covered with crimson and blue velvet respectively. Of this work, it may be said that design and execution are alike admirable, the whole composition being a most successful embodiment of what Mr. Bonnar considered should ever be the aim of the House-Decorator,—the combination, namely, of the highest class of art with the accessories usually employed in the ornamentation of Interiors. A difficult task, certainly; but that it can be accomplished, and that with the happiest results, Mr. Bonnar has abundantly proved. May many be stimulated to follow his example! Few indeed possess his rare gifts,

but all may imitate his spirit, all may strive to be imbued with his noble and serious views of his profession, all may like him elevate and not degrade their calling!

Mr. Bonnar painted about this time a classical subject—Apollo and the Muses—for the large cove over the proscenium of the Aberdeen Music Hall. In the same building he also decorated a room in the Pompeïian style. Brownlow House, near Belfast, and Ford Castle, the seat of the Dowager-Marchioness of Waterford, may also be mentioned as in possession of some beautiful specimens of his work. At Ford Castle, which is situated near the historical field of Flodden, he executed a very effective dining-room ceiling. In this, which is divided into compartments, he obtained the characteristic effect of Illumination by the introduction of mottoes, &c. Lady Waterford expressed in gratifying terms her admiration of this work. At Stichel House, near Kelso, Mr. Bonnar decorated the grand saloon in the Renaissance style with the most charming effect.

The colour-decorations of Messrs. Nelson and Sons' Saloon in Warwick Buildings, London, were designed by Mr. Bonnar, and executed under his superintendence. A very flattering notice of this work appeared in the *Art Journal* for September 1870, which, it being too long to insert here, will be found in the Appendix. For the same reason we relegate thither our description of the beautiful and elaborate decorations done for the late Marquis of Lothian at Newbattle

Abbey. Crawford Priory, Fifeshire, the seat of the Earl of Glasgow, is the scene of some of his most successful efforts. The architecture here is Gothic, and most admirably has the decorator adapted to it his colours and his mode of treatment. This is particularly observable in the private Chapel, where the rich harmony of tone makes a peculiarly pleasing impression on the beholder. The noble proprietor expressed his warm approval of the whole work, and remarked subsequently: "It remains a monument of Mr. Bonnar's good taste and excellent judgment."

Almost the last important undertaking entered into by Mr. Bonnar was the decoration of the Baron's Hall at Taymouth Castle, the seat of Lord Breadalbane. This magnificent apartment—which is 53 feet long, 28 feet wide, and 19 feet high—is used as a dining-room. The ceiling is vaulted, and divided into panels by mouldings springing from the walls, and terminating in rich tracery. The ground of the panels is filled in with beautiful colour and gilding, and each contains a heraldic shield emblazoned with the arms of some one of the various cadets of the family; while ornamental initial letters, on smaller shields, are interspersed throughout the ceiling. The walls are finished a rich Italian crimson, which harmonizes excellently with the decorated ceiling. The mantelpiece, which is an elaborate specimen of carved stone Gothic work, is decorated in colours and gold, and in the heraldic manner, so as to be in keeping with the rest of the

room. The ceiling of the small turret, which enters from this apartment, is finished in the same style as that of the latter. The small turret, entering from the drawing-room, is also most elaborately decorated in a rich Italian style, the arms of the Breadalbane family being introduced. All these decorations were designed by Mr. Bonnar, and carried out under his personal superintendence. They display all that careful study of detail, that skilful management of colour, and that mastery of artistic execution, which entitled him to rank among the first decorators of the day.

But now we are approaching the end of this laborious and honourable career. During the last two or three years of his life Mr. Bonnar permitted himself some partial relaxation from the cares of business, and thus, at last, was able to indulge, to some small extent at least, in his favourite pursuit. There is something almost pathetic in what we are told of his habits at this time. The mornings he devoted to his accustomed occupation,—very often compressing into them what would have been an ordinary man's whole day's work; but in the afternoons he would retire to his own apartment, and there, brush and palette in hand, would strive to realize his early artistic dreams. It is no easy task to attempt to gather up again a thread so long broken, but nevertheless Mr. Bonnar produced, in these quiet hours, some charming little bits, which, alas, only serve to indicate what "might have been." Two of these—"The Amateur," and "The Numis-

matist"—were exhibited in the Royal Scottish Academy in the season preceding his death. And thus he who at the call of duty had resolutely put aside for a lifetime what he would so gladly have made his main pursuit, takes up again in declining years, with feeble hand, the implements he loved so well. Alas, how soon was he obliged to relinquish them!

A visit to Paris about this time (1866) was a source of great enjoyment to him. The masterpieces of Art, especially of French Decorative Art, which he had there the opportunity of beholding, gave him intense delight. The works of Watteau, Le Brun, and others of their school,—of which the French capital has so many noble examples, and whose merits he was so well qualified to appreciate,—he was never tired of inspecting. His correspondence with friends at home during this period reflects the genuine pleasure this visit gave him; while his genial and humorous disposition, quick observation, and power of graphic description, made these, as they did his letters at all times, very enjoyable. His next Continental excursion he intended to be on a much larger scale. He meant to visit those cities throughout Europe which are famous for their art-treasures, making, as was meet in such a journey, Rome his headquarters. This project he was not permitted to carry out, for his last days were drawing very near. And these last days were, on the whole, very happy ones. Surrounded by an affectionate family, in the midst of his books and pictures,—for of both, especially of British

authors and Scottish painters, he had large and choice collections,—he enjoyed a serenity and happiness not given to all. And when the end came, it found him busy to the end, and characteristically busy at his loved pursuits. He was stricken brush in hand and canvas before him. He expired on the 3rd of January 1873. Thus terminated an active, honourable, and useful career. In Mr. Bonnar one left us whom we could ill afford to lose.

And if the preceding pages have at all accurately delineated his life, the main outlines of his character will be found there too. How thorough he was in all his undertakings, how unsparing of himself, how energetic; what a master of his profession he was, and yet withal how kindly and considerate in all his ways and dealings, they have surely indicated if not told. Both in public and private, an admirable man. To his lofty ideal of his profession we have already referred. It was his fixed purpose to make for the Decorator a recognized and honourable position in the World of Art. He did much in his own person for the accomplishment of this aim. And that he was justified in these aspirations who can doubt? For on the Decorator it depends whether we shall be surrounded in our daily life by crude and harsh forms, of which the effect is necessarily depressing and degrading, or whether we shall live in an atmosphere of beauty, which shall unconsciously harmonize with every noble and refined feeling and impulse. Far be it from the present writer to exaggerate the influence

of mere beauty and artistic propriety upon moral character—that must find its base and stimulus elsewhere; but all the same, beauty and artistic propriety exist, and have a place and function of their own, and in that place we must not despise them; we must, on the contrary, strive after them, and not be content until we attain them. Many pains they have soothed, many troubles allayed; they are amongst the most precious of what may be termed the “minor gifts” so bountifully bestowed upon us by the Giver of all good, and as such they are meant to be used and enjoyed. And thus all who, specially qualified for the task, devote their lives in one way or another to the service of the beautiful, do a good work—a work honourable in itself, and useful in a marked manner to their fellow-men. Such a work was that done by the late Mr. Bonnar. And though the greater number of Decorative masterpieces—such as those we have described—must, in the natural course of things, be confined to the mansions of the rich and great, he nevertheless did so much to bring the “art element” into a sphere whence, in this country at least, it had long been excluded, or never found an entrance,—that of general House-Decoration,—as to encourage the hope that one day it may, in its wider attributes at least, become universal. And he who paves the way for the accomplishment of this is a public benefactor.

We have already alluded to Mr. Bonnar's excellent library of English authors. He had a great love of books, especially

of poetry, of which he had a keen and delicate appreciation. Antiquarianism he also dabbled in, being considerably led thereto by the demands of his profession ; and of old coins he had a choice collection.

In Politics, as such, he took little if any interest, though of Mr. Gladstone he had a strong personal admiration. And of the greatest matter of all, it is not necessary to say much here. Far from demonstrative, nay, almost reserved in anything that touched him deeply, in what is most sacred of all Mr. Bonnar was not likely to depart from his usual habit of mind. Those who knew him best did not doubt that he was a humble and sincere Christian. And with regard to him in other aspects, we may sum up this brief memoir in the words of one who, from his close relationship to him, is on such matters the best qualified to speak :—"He was a fond and indulgent husband and father, a faithful and devoted friend, a generous and considerate master, an upright and honourable man."

APPENDIX.

I.

DESCRIPTIVE NOTICE OF THE DECORATION OF THE DRAWING-ROOM OF NEWBATTLE ABBEY.

(THE SEAT OF THE MARQUIS OF LOTHIAN.)

It is not very easy to define the conditions of house-decoration, or to say precisely in what it ought to consist. It holds the somewhat peculiar position of being an art, and yet not specifically such ; and is apt to suffer in public estimation from its close relationship to art proper—which in itself it is scarcely acknowledged to be. And yet it is astonishing to witness how truly artistic it may become in the hands of one who, recognizing its functions as lying in the production of a general effect, rather than in the expression of particular truth, subordinates it carefully to this idea. It then becomes an *art-generalization*—an art-atmosphere, so to speak—where the whole apartment is felt to have about it a certain *air* with which art proper at once falls in and harmonizes ; while any more definite forms, here and there introduced, are so introduced, not so much for their own sakes, but as a sort of efflorescence which rises out of the generalization, and becomes suggestive in a manner of the possibilities of higher art.

Some such idea as this has evidently guided the judgment of our townsman Mr. Bonnar in important works of this description which have been recently executed, and which we lately had an opportunity of examining.

Whether we consider the scale of magnitude on which these works have been carried out—the extreme nicety displayed in the gradation and balancing of colours, or the pleasing and harmonious unity of effect obtained, from multitudinous details indeed, but these so skilfully blended that nothing individual is obtruded, the general impression only being felt—we are forced to conclude that he has been directed by sound principles in his work, and has been enabled to carry forward decorative art to a point which, while highly creditable to himself, reflects honour on the city to which he belongs.

From amongst the specimens which pleased us most, we shall here select one, the satisfactory results of which go far to show the wide range and great capabilities of this art.

The work we refer to is the Drawing-room at Newbattle Abbey, the seat of the Marquis of Lothian. Previous to the decoration which it has recently received, this room, although of goodly proportions,—being 50 feet long by 20 broad, with a height of about 25 feet,—had, if we except a handsome cornice, little architectural pretensions. The walls, with the exception of the panelled surbase below, and the cornice and frieze above, were perfectly plain, and joined the ceiling by a deep cove having an enriched moulding at the upper edge. The ceiling again was all plain, but divided into three spaces in the length, the centre space being formed into an elliptical panel. But if plain, it thus left the decorator more unfettered, and gave him greater scope for the display of his creative faculties. These faculties have in this instance been well exercised, and a beautiful transformation of the spacious apartment is the result. With regard to the walls, the surbase, together with the whole of the window-finishings, have been painted a quiet shade of citron olive, brought to an enamel surface, and highly burnished, having the base and panel mouldings gilded solid. The surbase has also been enriched, and finished with a handsome crested ornament.

Above the surbase the walls are finished in “Morocco” of a deep giraffe colour; while the cornice, frieze, and architrave have received a tint of the same. The modillions in the cornice, patera, and other enrichments, as well as a portion of the plain mouldings, have been gilded in such a manner as to produce the effect of solid gilding without its peculiar heaviness. The general

effect is admirable. A full and rich, yet subdued, tone of colour is obtained, which, pleasing in itself, presents at the same time an excellent background for receiving pictures. While the walls have been thus treated with great judgment and success, it is in the ceiling that the decorator has found the fullest scope for his art; and on this he has displayed knowledge and invention, under the control of the finest taste, in a manner and to an extent which are rarely to be met with. To give a complete description of all the details which enter into this beautiful design, and which result in an art-canopy, so to speak, to which the eye insensibly rises from the more defined art in the pictures on the walls, as to an overhanging firmament bright with all the tints and possibilities of beauty, would be much more than our space permits us to do. But this we consider to be the great merit of the work, that while rich with manifold details carefully thought out and as carefully executed,—much fine figure-drawing, points of colour, harmonious adjustment of parts, &c.,—it is nevertheless so admirably kept within the sphere of decorative art, that the sentiment of the whole is of a widely general character, making little demand for special recognition, but lovingly overarching the whole like an azure dome, holding within it many shapes of fancy, and hints of the beautiful—a rare *mélange* of colour and form, of balanced harmony with graceful variety, which gives scope to the imagination while it pleases the eye.

In the attainment of this much careful study has evidently been expended. The cove—formerly plain—has been subdivided into a series of lunette-shaped panels, the ground of which is filled in with a quiet blue; while in the centre of each are placed circular medallions, with groups of boys, life-size, painted in shades of white on a diapered metallic ground, the remainder of the panel containing arabesque ornament and chimeras in a light subdued bronze colour. Over the medallions are placed tablets, coloured blue and red alternately, bordered with gold lines, and filled in with allegorical subjects painted in “Grisaille,” which being smaller gives a pleasing variety with the life-size figures in the medallions; while the squareness of their form, and the straight lines by which these tablets are bounded, emphasize and enhance, by contrast, the beauty of the scroll ornament. In the centre of the spandrel panels, between the lunettes, are caryatic figures, passing off into rich scroll foliage of

a Raphaelesque character. The ground of the framework which separates the lunette panels from the spandrels is a dark, rich brown, covered with an interlacing ornamental pattern. There is a good deal of minute tasteful filling in in the interstices of these, and in other parts of the general design, which although in themselves and all contributing to the main effect, we cannot stop to particularize. We may mention, however, that in the elliptical panel in the centre of the ceiling a *circular* panel has been formed, in which are painted groups of winged boys, life-size, in their natural colours, broken and subdued by air-tones,—these groups being united and held together with festoons of flowers and flying birds, all painted on a diapered metallic ground, &c. This part of the work has been very happily treated, and produces a most pleasing effect. Arabesque ornaments, with characteristic shields in the centre of each space, emblazoned with the family arms, occupy the remaining portion of the elliptical panel. The two end spaces of the ceiling have medallions at each angle, with figures painted white, in relief, on blue grounds; and between these medallions are large tablets with gold lines, and filled in with blue, and supported by winged Cupids surrounded with Scroll foliage, &c. The framework of these medallions is connected with that of the elliptical panel by bands radiating from it to the angles of the square, thus dividing the end spaces of the ceiling into more shapely compartments, which again are occupied by figures and other appropriate forms of ornamentation.

Altogether, this design is such as to show that it has been conceived and executed in the spirit of true art; and that while our National Academy has within these few years taken a high position in its proper sphere, decorative art has not lagged behind, but has kept pace with the movement in its own province. Nor, when we contemplate such works as the present, is it possible for us to regard its function as an easy or inferior one. There is a point at which all good art, under whatever name, meets; and we feel that this work could not have been accomplished apart from many long years of previous discipline and study, as well as that sound taste and that thorough knowledge of principles which are common alike to high art and its subordinate branches. All these can be claimed for Mr. Bonnar, who has the entire merit of this beautiful and important example of decorative art. Not

only was the design his, but all the principal parts were painted by his own hand, while the other portions were arranged and touched upon by him. The name of Mr. Bonnar was previously well known in this connection, and is favourably remembered for his beautiful examples of art decoration sent by his firm to the London and Dublin International Exhibitions; and it may not be out of place to add here, that for many years he had the direction and carrying out of all the higher class decorations which were executed in the establishment of the late Mr. Hay,—a circumstance which gave him ample experience in figure-painting, as well as in all the other requisite accomplishments of his art. The truth is that Mr. Bonnar is, strictly speaking, an artist; and had he thought fit to devote himself to this walk, would undoubtedly have achieved in it no small reputation. We have abundant evidence of this in the work to which we have been referring; and yet, with singular judgment and self-denial, he does not make his decoration a series of *pictures*, which would be aside from its purpose and meaning, but preserves amid all his elaboration the strictly decorative character. Generally speaking, especially when a room is intended to be hung round with pictures, the ceiling should be strictly decorative in its ornamentation, and consequently airy and general in its effect, otherwise a discord is certain to be produced; as, for example, in the Painted Hall at Greenwich, where there is a manifest and felt incongruity between the comparatively small individual pictures on the walls, and the vast colossal figures which seem to drag down the roof. The ceiling should be rather a general echo of all that the apartment contains, than a particular example of something additional. It should gather up the spirit of the whole apartment and overhang it like an atmosphere, art-peopled indeed, and art-illuminated, yet distant and wide, even as the sky overhangs the hills, and the trees, and the pleasant grass.

As a whole, the works which we have examined—in addition to the one above alluded to—have proved a great success; most creditable to their originator; and most encouraging, as a proof of the taste, knowledge, and skill with which this interesting branch of æsthetics is prosecuted amongst us.

II.

CRITICAL NOTICE OF DECORATION OF WARWICK BUILDINGS, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.

(FROM THE "ART JOURNAL" OF SEPTEMBER 1870.)

THE decorated ceiling of which we reproduce the design (showing the quarter of a compartment and the soffit, and also an elevation of half a girder), is introduced into the apartment on the ground-floor of the south-west angle of the building occupied as a shop by Messrs. Nelson. The iron girders in question, which support the first floor, divide this ceiling into six compartments, richly ornamented with mouldings in *carton pierre*, with colour and with gilding, as mentioned in our former notice.

The idea which led to the adoption of the decoration represented by our illustration was that of finishing the apartment as a first-class library, in which the colour should be at the same time deep, rich, and cheerful. To this end a medium depth of the tertiary colours was adopted for the ceiling, and gold was freely used; being made, in some places, the ground to receive the details, and in others being employed to heighten and relieve the mouldings.

The ceiling is, as we remarked above, divided into six compartments by iron girders, around each of which is carried the same cornice that is used on the walls. Each compartment is again subdivided, and formed into smaller panels, four of which are elliptical and two circular. The second engraving shows one quarter of one of the circular panels, with a portion of the soffit, and an elevation of the side of the enclosing beam.

In the centre of each panel there is a sunlight gas-burner. The remaining area of the circle, which forms the largest portion of the ceiling, is filled in

with a pale grayish blue, diapered with a pattern of a darker shade of the same colour. The whole is enclosed within an ornate border, worked in lower tones of the tertiaries, picked out with the primary colours, and heightened with gold.

The spandrel panels in the angles have a ground of soft yellow, on which the ornaments are worked in low relief, and coloured with purple tints. Ornamental panels are placed in the centre of each spandrel, formed by bands of citron colour, hatched with gold, enclosing a blue ground. These panels are intended to be inscribed with the names of eminent authors.

The cornice on the walls and beams has been executed in darker shades of the same colours that are employed on the ceiling, heightened by the use of gold. The object of this treatment was to increase the apparent height of the ceiling. The soffits of the girders have been treated in a similar way; and the walls have been kept very low in tone, being painted of a full deep maroon colour, with a border at top and bottom formed of bands of darker hue, enriched with gold lines.

To receive the most satisfactory impression from these decorations, the observer should descend the staircase in the corner of the room where the eye can command more of the ceiling; the effect from which point is extremely rich and harmonious.

The soffits of the windows are worked with ornamental patterns of the same style and colour as the decoration of the ceiling. The window jambs are coloured like the walls, and diapered with bands of darker colour, relieved with gold, forming each into a panel, as shown in the engraving.

It will be seen that no small amount of thoughtful care has been bestowed upon the decoration of this handsome apartment, and that nothing can be more opposed to the indiscriminate use of gold and gorgeous colour than the elaboration of a design for every detail of which the artist has a reason to render. We should like to see the decoration of one of the large banqueting-halls of the City Companies entrusted to the hands that have ornamented Messrs. Nelson's warehouse. For a large and lofty apartment, dedicated to festive purposes, this elaborate style of treatment is eminently appropriate. Warwick Buildings will certainly rank among the show-places of the city;

but we should like to see more ample scope given for the practice of this Italian style of architectural enrichment.

The colour-decorations were designed by Mr. Bonnar, of the firm of Purdie, Bonnar, and Carfrae, Edinburgh, by whom they were executed, and who have recently been largely employed on similar works,—more particularly in the execution of some elaborate decoration at Newbattle Abbey, near Edinburgh, for the late Marquis of Lothian.

The detailed account which we have here given is far from doing adequate justice to the striking effect and beauty of a work which is well fitted to extend the credit of this eminent firm of decorative artists; for it is impossible to give, even with the aid of an engraving, which cannot perfectly translate colour into black and white, a true idea of a work that should be seen to be rightly appreciated.

